

Where Will You or Your Family Be When an Emergency or Disaster Strikes?



You could be anywhere — at work, at school or in the car. How will you find each other? Will you know if your children are safe?



Emergencies and disasters strike quickly and without warning and can force you to evacuate your neighborhood or confine you to your home. What would you do if basic services — water, gas, electricity or telephones — were cut off?



Local officials and relief workers will be on the scene after a disaster, but they cannot reach everyone right away.

People can cope with disaster by preparing in advance and with families working together as a team. Follow the steps listed in this brochure to create your disaster plan.

Knowing what to do is your best protection and your responsibility.



FOUR STEPS TO SAFETY

1. Understand What Could Happen

Look Around Where You Live

Emergencies such as terrorism, fire, hazardous materials spills, power outages or those caused by natural disasters such as tornadoes and winter storms can happen anywhere to anyone. Even disasters such as hurricanes and flash floods can affect most regions of the state. Look around where you live. Are you near an interstate that could have a hazardous materials spill? Are you in a flood zone? Ask yourself what emergencies or disasters could occur in your area. Visit www.vaemergency.com for more information.

Community Warning Signals

Determine if your community has warning signals. If so, find out what they sound like and what you should do when you hear them. If not, work with authorities to develop a system and keep a battery-powered radio handy.

Find Out About Community Disaster Plans

Find out about the disaster plans at your workplace, your children's school or daycare center, your community and other places where you or your family spend time.

If A Disaster or Emergency Strikes

As we learned from the events of Sept. 11, 2001, as well as from many other natural disasters, the following things can happen:

1. There can be significant numbers of casualties/damage to buildings and the infrastructure. Employers need up-to-date information about your medical needs and on how to contact your family.
2. Health and mental health resources in the affected communities can be strained to their limits, maybe even overwhelmed.
3. Extensive media coverage, strong public fear and international implications can continue for a prolonged period.
4. Workplaces and schools may be closed, and domestic and international travel may be restricted.
5. You and your family or household may have to evacuate an area, avoiding roads blocked for your safety.
6. Cleanup may take many months.
7. If a chemical or biological emergency occurs, you can be exposed to the toxins by inhaling them, swallowing contaminated food, water or medication, or by touching or coming in contact with contaminated items. You may be told by authorities to evacuate to a designated location or be asked to shelter in your home, sealing all windows and doors and turning off air intake.



2. Create an Emergency/Disaster Plan

Meet with Your Family

Discuss the types of disasters and emergencies that are most likely to happen and what to do in each case. Explain the dangers to children and plan to share the responsibilities, working as a team. If you have in-home child care, include the caregiver in your plan.

Determine Where to Meet

1. A place right outside your home in case of a sudden emergency, like a fire.
2. A location outside your neighborhood in case you can't return home. Make wallet cards, so everyone will know the address and phone number of the place where you are to meet. For older children, select a "safe house" in areas they frequent — until it is safe to meet.

Have an "Out-of-Town" Contact

Ask an out-of-town friend or relative to be your contact. After a disaster, it's often easier to call long distance. Other family members should call this person and tell them where they are. Everyone must know the contact's phone number, and cell phone number if they have one. Note: If telephones are not working, try e-mail. Sometimes e-mail gets through when calls cannot. Be aware that cell phones are often overloaded during and immediately after an emergency, so it is important to know "land line" phone numbers as well. Check www.vaemergency.com for up-to-date emergency information.

Have an Emergency Plan for the Mobility Impaired

Keeping support items in the same place, so they can always be found quickly, is essential. For those who have home-health caregivers, particularly for those who are bed-bound, it is essential to have an alternate plan if the home-health caregiver cannot make it to you.

If Children are in School during a Disaster or Emergency

Check the local media for announcements about changes in school openings and closings. Parents can always pick up their children during the school day, but sometimes the safest place might be the school itself. For older children who self-transport, ask them to follow the instructions of authorities.

Know What to Do in an Evacuation

1. Listen to your battery-powered radio and follow the instructions of local emergency officials.
2. Wear protective clothing and sturdy shoes.
3. Take your Disaster Supplies Kit. You will put this together in Step 3.
4. Listen to your battery-powered radio or car radio and use travel routes specified by local authorities — don't use shortcuts because certain areas may be impassable or dangerous.
5. If you do not own a vehicle or drive, learn in advance what your community's arrangements are for those without private transportation.

Know What to Do if Informed to "Shelter-in-Place"

Local officials may ask residents to shelter-in-place during a chemical or hazardous materials emergency. This means you must remain in your home or office and protect yourself there.

1. Lock all windows and exterior doors and close vents and fireplace dampers. Turn off all fans and heating and air conditioning systems.
2. Get your disaster supplies kit and make sure the battery-powered radio is working.
3. Go to an interior room without windows that is above ground level. Some chemicals are heavier than air and may seep into basements.
4. Using duct tape, seal all cracks around the door and any vents into the room. Include spaces around pipes.
5. Listen to the radio or television until you are told all is safe or you are told to evacuate.

Look to Your Neighbors

Working with neighbors can save lives and property. Know your neighbors' skills (i.e., medical, technical) and consider how you can help neighbors with special needs, such as disabled or elderly persons. Make plans for child care in case parents can't get home.

What to Do if An Emergency/Disaster Strikes

1. If the disaster occurs near you, be prepared to give first aid and get help for seriously injured people.
2. If the emergency occurs while you are at home, check for damage using a flashlight. Do not light matches or candles or turn on electrical switches.
3. Check for fires, electrical and other household hazards. Be aware that spilled bleaches, gasoline and other liquids may produce deadly fumes when chemicals mix, or be a fire hazard. Get advice from the local fire department on how to clean up spilled liquids, especially if there are noxious fumes.
4. Sniff for gas leaks, starting at the water heater. If you smell gas or suspect a leak, turn off the main gas valve, open windows and get everyone outside quickly.
5. Shut off any other damaged utilities. Know in advance how to shut off all utility valves and the electricity.
6. Plan to take pets with you if you need to evacuate. Do not leave them behind. If you do not need to evacuate, confine or secure your pets (they're frightened, too, and may run away or bite someone).
7. Check on your neighbors, especially those who are elderly or disabled.
8. Call your family contact — do not use the telephone again unless it is a life-threatening emergency.

Have an Emergency Plan for Your Pets

Due to health regulations, animals are not allowed inside emergency shelters. Make arrangements for your pets, either securing them in your home or transporting them to a safe place.